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AUTHOR Sakowicz, Anita B.
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ABSTRACT

A study compared two groups of children in an urban elementary school who were unready for second grade at the conclusion of first grade. A group of 15 students was retained in first grade while another group of 45 students was promoted to second grade. The California Achievement Test was used to measure the reading ability of both groups at the end of second grade. Results indicated no significant difference between the two groups. Of the 48 classroom teachers at the elementary school, 37 responded to a survey concerning their attitudes towards retention. Results indicated that the teachers preferred retention but were willing to take into consideration current research which indicates that retention is not effective. (Contains 21 references and 4 tables of data. The survey instrument is appended.) (Author/RS)

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ED 393 081

# The Effect of Retention, in Grade One, On the Slow Reader

by

**Anita B. Sakowicz**

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Abstract

This study compared two groups of children that were unready for Second Grade at the conclusion of First Grade. One group was retained in first grade ( N=15) while the other group (N=45) were promoted to second grade. The California Achievement Test was used to measure the reading ability of both groups at the end second grade. There was no significant difference between the two groups in this study. A historical perspective of retention and child development is given. Also, a survey of thirty-nine classroom teachers attitudes toward retention indicating a preference for retention but a willingness to take into consideration current research.

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

Grade retention or non-promotion is the practice of requiring a student to repeat a year of academic instruction at a particular level (Jackson, 1975). It is often euphemistically called "a year to grow", "a gift of time", and is less politically known as flunking, holding back, repeating, and retardation (Ostrowski, 1987).

Grade retention by whatever name is an issue public education had to face since students were organized to allow more homogeneous instruction to take place. Unsuccessful achievement resulted in retention. A pattern of retention was established in most urban schools in the United States by the end of the Civil War (Holmes & Mathews, 1984). Since then, the practice of retention has been marked by cycles of popularity (Rose, 1983). During the 19th and early 20th centuries it was common to retain the "slow learners". From the 1930's until the early 1960's "social promotion" was the thing to do . During the 1960's gradual drop in standardized achievement scores caused critics to point to social promotion as a primary cause for children completing school unable to demonstrate a grasp of the academic fundamentals (Sandoval & Fitzgerald, 1985). Educators began to respond to the public demand for educational

accountability in the late 1970's and early 1980's. The side effect was an increase in the rate of retention (Holmes, 1983).

Trends of retaining and promoting children in the primary grades have fluctuated in past years. Advocates state that it improves poor academic progress and enhances the development of socially immature students. It is believed that an additional year in the primary grades will give the immature student maturation time for a more successful future (Shepard & Smith, 1989). Goodlad (1954) found less damage to a child's social relations with peers among first grade retainees than those retained in later years.

No one would argue that schools should allow students to move through the grades without learning. Yet there is widespread disagreement over what to do about the problem. Most school systems policies are so vague that the brunt of the decision making falls on the individual teacher. The teacher considers the child's abilities, social/emotional development, physical size, and home situation as important elements of decision making. The teacher who decides to retain does so with the best intentions for the child in mind. This practice is more seriously entertained in the primary grades where it's felt that the possibility of catching up will be more likely.

Natale (1991) indicated there was a growing viewpoint that student retention was more harmful than helpful. Holmes(1989) found largely negative effects for retention. That children retained were worse off personally and academically.

The problem is that studies on retention are saying no, but teachers are retaining more than less.

***THE HYPOTHESIS***

To provide additional evidence, on the topic, the following study was undertaken to determine if retention, in grade one, of urban slow readers is beneficial to them as measures by reading results. It was hypothesized that retaining children in grade one would not benefit the slow reader as measured by the C.A.T. administrated after one year of retention.

***THE PROCEDURE***

One elementary school, consisting of five first and second grades, in an urban school district was utilized for this study. The subject used in this study were included using the following criteria: (a) they scored at the 50$^{th}$ percentile or below on the California Achievement Test in first grade and,

(b) they had taken the California Achievement Test at the end of second grade. This information was obtained from the students cumulative record file.

Using the N.C.E. (Normal Curve Equivalent) score in reading 60 students were identified as having scored at the 50th percentile or below. Of those 60 students, 45 that scored in the 50th percentile or below had been promoted to the second grade while 15 students, who fit the above criteria had been retained in first grade. The scores accumulated were from the spring of '93 in first grade as well scores of the non-retained sample at the end of grade two in 1994, and scores of the retained sample on completion of grade two in 1995.

**RESULTS**

As can be seen in Table I, the sample of first grade students at the onset of this study were marginally different than the retained sample. The retained sample was expected, less able, as a group, than the non retained

**Table I**

| Sample | Mean | Standard Deviation | Range | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Non Retained '93 | 37.84 | 11.50 | 1-50 | 45 |
| Retained '93 | 26.53 | 14.55 | 1-58 | 15 |

sample. Scores for the retained sample Normal Curve Equivalent (N.C.E.)ranged from a low of 1 to a high of 58 while the non retained sample ranged only up to 50. This difference accounts for the larger standard deviation in favor of the non retained sample.

In, 1994 at the end of the second grade, tests were again administered to the non-retained sample. Table II shows that the sample lost almost 3 points from the end of the first grade to the end of the second grade.

**TABLE II**

Pre & Post Test results of the non-retained subjects

| | | M | S.D. | t | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1993 | Test | 37.84 | 11.50 | .99 | 45 |
| 1994 | Test | 35.02 | 15.26 | | |

This loss is duplicated in the findings for the retained sample shown in Table III. The loss of Mean, Standard Deviation and t of the sample at the end of first grade (1993)and second grade (1995).

**TABLE III**

| Samples | M | S.D | t | N=15 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1993 NCE Results | 30.87 | 18.10 | .72 | |
| 1995 NCE Results | 23.53 | 14.5 | | |

over 4 points was not statistically significant, however, Table IV details the

**TABLE IV**

| Sample | M | S.D | t |
|---|---|---|---|
| Retained | 26.53 | 4.54 | 1.89 |
| Non-Retained | 35.02 | 15.26 | |

results when the post test is examined for both samples at the end of the second grade, to determine the significance of the second year spent in first grade. As is seen both samples lost mean score points over time. However, the mean of the samples maintain their same relative position from 1993 to 1995. A mean difference in 1993 of 11.31 is comparable to the 9.51 difference in 1995. The difference is approaching significance at the t .05 level as shown by the t of 1.89.

Recent research (Tanner & Combs, 1995) has indicated that teachers are either unaware of or ignoring findings on retention. Therefore, a survey of teachers attitude toward retention, in the elementary school studied, seemed indicated.

Of the 48 classroom teachers sampled in this study 37 responded to the survey shown below.

**Survey Results**

1. Retention prepares a student for successful achievement in the following grade.

   Yes 54% No 13% Undecided 15%

2. Retaining a student in first grade harms the student's self-concept.

   Yes 13% No 72% Undecided 15%

3. Immature first graders benefit from retention.

   Yes 74% No 8% Undecided 20%

4. The only time to retain is in the first three years.

   Yes 23% No 59% Undecided 10%

5. The decision to retain is the responsibility of the teacher.

   Yes 79% No 10% Undecided 10%

6. Alternatives to retention are a better avenue to follow.

   Yes 28% No 21% Undecided 51%

7. School policy encourages retention as a way to improve student success.

   Yes 23% No 44% Undecided 33%

8. Research on retention indicates that retention is not successful.

Yes 10% No 28% Undecided 62%

9. Parent attitude should be a major concern when retention is considered.

Yes 38% No 46% Undecided 15%

10. My opinion on retention could be changed if educational studies proved me wrong.

Yes 59% No 20.5% Undecided 20.5%

## CONCLUSIONS

This study indicates that retention of students in first grade does not appear to produce an improvement in their reading achievement by the end of the second grade. Children who remained in first grade, an additional year, did not achieve more than the promoted sample according to their reading scores on the California Achievement Test.

The hypothesis has been supported by the results of this study. The implication is that a solution other than retention needs to be implemented to provide a necessary education to all of our students.

Despite such findings the teacher attitude survey on retention indicated that teachers favor retention. Slightly more than half of the surveys indicated mixed feelings about alternatives. A majority of those

surveyed were not familiar with the current research on retention but remained open minded.

# Retention and Child Development

## Related Research

Of all the major issues in education, grade retention represents of the clearest examples of non-communication between research and practice. Although condemned by researchers for decades (Abidin, Golladay, and Howerton, 1971; Holmes, 1989; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Shephard & Smith, 1986, 1989), the practice of retention, also known as non-promotion, holding back, or "flunking" continues to be used widely by school districts throughout the country. (Meisels & Liaw, 1993.

Retention has historically been seen as a solution to student failure. By controlling the flow of low - achieving students through a system of mass compulsory education, retention practices give the appearance of accountability and enforcement of standards without intervening in the underlying problem, that of low student achievement. School personnel may feel that retaining a child is "doing something" for that child, while still holding the child responsible for the failure (Schwager, 1993).

Grade retention is an extraordinarily sensitive topic in most schools. Although well intentioned, the decision to retain a student is always difficult for teachers: the failure of students leads teachers to confront their own inability to help some students, to wonder whether other teachers

could have been more successful and to question their own abilities and perhaps redefine their self-image.

Dauber, Entwisle and Alexander (1993) study focused on trying to identify factors that distinguish retained children from promoted children and also factor that distinguished the risk of retention in first grade from later retention.

There wee 790 children from 20 schools studied, Socio-demographic variables, test scores, and teacher and parent judgments of childrens' ability and adjustment to school. Each was measured before or early in the first grade from those retained later. Retained children were more often male, African- American, had less educated parents, and more often came from poverty-level households. Children retained in first grade differed from later retainees only in the severity of their initial academic skill deficiencies. First graders had the additional pressure of making the transition to formal schooling.

A typical profile of the child as high rish for being retained would include:

1. Males (various studies show ratio of 2 to up to 0 to 1 over females)

2. Significantly lower academic achievement
3. Somewhat lower IQ (5 to 10 points)
4. Parents unwilling or unable to intercede in the child's behalf, to contest the retention
5. Minority status
6. Low socioeconomic status
7. Working mother
8. Poor early readiness skills
9. July to December birth date
10. Late maturation (physical, mental, or social)
11. High activity level

(Abidin, 1971; Donofrio, 1977)

Educators who favor retention claim, that it remedies inadequate academic achievement and that it aids in the development of social and emotional skills( Ames, 1980).

(Medway, 1986) suggests the best candidates are primary students, chronologically young, not opposed to being retained, with parents who accept the decision and work with the child at home.

In an extensive 2- year study, Sandoval and Hughes (1981) conducted a research project for two purposes: (a) to identify characteristics of children who profited from retention and (b) to identify the factors in the retained group that facilitated success after failure. The subject sample was 146 first graders who had been identified as potential repeaters. Of this number, 84 remained in first grade and 62 were promoted. The researchers individually tested the children in an effort to assess academic relationships, cognitive, and physical development. Additionally, parent and teacher interviews were conducted. The results of this report indicated that the child's family background, early life experiences, physical size, and visual-motor development are, along with teacher philosophy, relatively unimportant determinants of whether or not the child evidences subsequent success from the repeated year. It appeared that the best predictors of successful retention outcomes are the child's initial status in three areas, emotional development, and social skills. More specifically, when compared with less successful retainees, successful retainees initially had the highest level of achievement (better academic

skills), the highest self-concept (greater self-esteem), the best social skills (good interpersonal skills), and the most involved parents. subsequent analysis indicated that, when comparing the successful retainees with a promoted group, the successful retained group was inferior to the promoted group only in mathematical achievement. In other measured areas, the successful retained group was equivalent

to or, in the case of emotional adjustment, superior to the promoted group.

These results indicate that a successful non-promotion may enhance the overall development of the child. However, Sandoval & Hugh ( 1981) warn us to be cautious in accepting the results of their study concretely. Their concerns are (a) the data reduction procedures employed, which "simply selected variables with good psychometric properties and good correlation with other variables," and (b) the fact that this study evaluated retainees for only 1 year after non-promotion.

H. Wayne Light, a California psychologist and Lawrence Lieberman, a consultant in special education developed similar sets of factors with which to judge an individual retention candidate. Factors shared by Light and Lieberman include the following:

a. students' chronological age
b. knowledge of English
c. siblings' retention experience
d. previous retentions
e. present grade (lower the grade, the more likely the success)
f. estimate of intelligence
g. school attendance
h. history of learning disabilities
I. student attitude toward retention

Who is retained? Meisel and Liaw (1993) study indicated that overall, minority students were retained in significantly higher proportions than white The African American students 29.9% , Hispanic 25.2% in contrast with 17.2% of white students. Among retainees, boys significantly outnumber girls 24% to 15.3%. Social class was also significantly related to retention from low socioeconomic status families were much more likely to experience retention. The largest proportion of retentions occurred in the first 4 years of school: kindergarten (11.6%, first grade (27.4%), second grade (15.2%) and third grade (13.0.%).

The results of the analysis suggest that early retention is generally more favorable than later retention for the academic performance, early

retention is less favorable than later retention for girls and African Americana students, although it was more favorable for students of highly educated mothers. With respect to emotional problems, early retention is more favorable than later retention for girls and lower socioeconomic students. Overall, retention does not seem to leave a lasting academic advantage on students' eight-grade outcomes when compared with those of non-retainees.

Grissom and Shepard (1989) noted that "for equally poor achievement, children are more likely to be retained if they are boys, small for their age, relatively young for their grade, seem immature, or are members of a school culture that practices retention at greater rates than other schools." Research has documented extensively that children who fall into these combined categories are often seen as less able by their teachers regardless of their actual abilities (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Alexander, Entwisle & Thomson, 1987 ; Parsons, Adler, & Kacaala, 1982; Risk, 1970). That retentions decisions are not independent of demographic characteristics are of major significance.

Supporters of retention have argued that to (promote unprepared students negatively effects self-concept (Owen & Ranick, 1977). Also

retention has been supported on the basis that it creates homogeneous classes (Faeber, 1984). However, studies by Haac (1984), Manley (1988), Doyle (1989), and Tomchin (1990) showed that teachers did not believe that retention prevented a wide range of ability in the classroom.

Kerzner (1982) also investigated the educational merit of retaining low achieving elementary school students in the same grade for a designated time period. The subjects in this study were 56 students who had progressed and completed one grade beyond the retained grade. The progress of this group was evaluated by their performance on the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills. Both pre-retention and post retention test scores were compared. The results revealed some positive aspects of retention. It was found that, overall, retention was academically beneficial to all grades observed; however, retained children in second or third grades appeared to have evidenced the greatest positive effects.

Jackson 1975 stated educators favor retention for two major reasons: "to remedy inadequate academic progress and to aid in the development of students who are judged to be emotionally immature".

Ebel (1980), believes that public education will not regain the respect it would have unless educators accept the hard task of identifying and reporting failure to learn.

1. Success has no meaning or value in the absence of the responsibility and indeed the occasional experience of failure.
2. Pupil achievements are the consequence of many influences, not all of which are under the control of the teacher.
3. There is educational value in the experience of failure.

Ebel feels that a pupil's achievement in learning rests with the pupil not with the teacher or the school. If the pupil is unwilling to unable to make the effort that study requires, to put reading, thinking and writing ahead of other things that are fun to do, little learning will occur. Pupils can be given information. They cannot be given knowledge. To accumulate knowledge a pupil must digest and assimilate the information received by thinking about it. Disciplined thinking can be hard work.

Because of the pupils fundamental and crucial role in the learning process, no teacher and no school should accept full responsibility for the success of all pupils in learning.

Finlayson conducted a two-year study of the self-concept of 75 promoted, retained, and borderline-promoted first grade students. He

discovered that non-promotion did not create self-concept problems, and that the self-concept scores of retained students continued to increase while those of promoted and borderline-promoted students dropped slightly.

Riffel & Switzer ( 1986) say that retention should be undertaken after all other instructional avenues have been explored and only for the purposes of assisting students to master requirements necessary for success at the next level. It means an approach that eliminates repetition. Many educators have forgotten the dictum of Binet, the creator of the first intelligence test: "after the illness, the remedy." We have used pupil retention in the same way that we have come to misuse intelligence test results - for purposes of placing students and not for developing programs in which children are enabled to master basic skills as well as to attain their highest possible levels of achievement.

There are no consistent benefits of grade retention for the majority of students with serious academic or adjustment problems (Medway, 1986). "Why then", Medway asked, "are so many children being retained?"

1. Retention responds to the need for accountability to the public.
2. Nearly all retained children make some progress in the repeated year.

3. Parents often ask for retention particularly if they feel it helped another of their children.

4. Three out of ten children do benefit from retention, according to the research (Bucko, 1986).

Holmes and Matthews (1984), of the University of Georgia, reviewed 650 studies from which 44 were selected. The selected groups represented 4,208 non-promoted students and 6, 924 regularly promoted students. Five major areas of dependent variables were addressed: academic achievement, personal adjustment, self-concept, attitude toward school, and attendance. In every area the promoted group scored better than the retained group.

Holmes, (1989) conducted a meta-analysis of 63 studies on retention which showed that when retainee and non-retainee student outcomes were assessed immediately after completion of the same grade, retainees outperformed non-retainees (this is known as an equal-grade contrast). However, this advantage decreased steadily; after three grades, equal -grade contrasts were indistinguishable on academic out comes. The equal-age contrast (I3, when retained students are compared to an equivalently age non-retained group) favored the non-retainees by .83

standard deviation. He concluded "retained children were worse off than their promoted counterparts on both personal adjustment and academic outcomes."

Natale (1991) indicated there was a growing viewpoint that student retention was more harmful than helpful.

Mantizizopoulos & Morrison (1992) compared and matched kindergarten students in two ways (a) within the same year (or same-age group) and (b) within the same grade. They explored both academic and behavioral effects of kindergarten retention with a group of retained and promoted students through the end of second grade. Thirty-five children retained 1985-86 and 18 retained 1986-87 were matched with 53 promoted peers. Same age comparisons revealed the retained children scored almost a standard deviation above the mean during their second year in kindergarten. This advantage disappeared as soon as they entered first grade and showed no advantage in second grade.

According to Balow (1990) arguments concerning retention and promotion usually ignore the fact that neither action results in dramatic increases in the achievement. "When low-achieving pupils are retained, they remain low achievers-- when promoted they continue to be low

achievers. Neither retention nor promotion is beneficial to the pupils or to the school, if not accompanied by effective programmatic interventions."

Snyder & West (1992) did a study examining the impact of retention on the academic performance of 40 students who were retained in grades 3 or 5 during the 1985-86 school year, and 70 students who were not retained. The Stanford Achievement Test was used to compare/contrast. Results indicated the: (1) students who were retained showed an increase the second year in the same grade; (2) the increase scores diminished the following year: and (3) in the third year there was no difference in scores of retained vs. promoted. Results also indicated no differences in the effects of retention for students in urban and rural schools.

Because retention itself is considered to be the treatment, there is usually no additional effort to correct the lack of teaching and learning that occurred the first time through. Merely repeating the same curriculum or instruction is not likely to fix the problem. (Palmer, 1989).

The Gesell Institute of Human Development (1980) proposed a developmental placement program where a child is started in school and promoted by the Gesell Screening Test. They believed that 50% of the

school problems could be alleviated with this method. May & Welch (1984) determined if retention based on the Gesell development placement does affect children's performance. They selected 223 children representing all grade 2-6 enrolled in the same school from kindergarten. Although retained children were chronologically older, they did not perform as well on standardized tests as the promoted group.

Shepard & Smith (1987) assessed the effect of retention on first grade achievement and adjustment. The study was done in a Colorado school district where schools within the district differed in the percentage of retained students. Eighty children were matched on socioeconomic and achievement levels and compared at the end of first grade. There were no differences between the retained and control group on teacher ratings of reading and math achievement. The groups did not significantly differ on the California Test of Basic Skills reading or math scores. Shepard & Smith found these results to be consistent with existing studies on the effects of two year kindergarten programs.

Children perceive retention as a punishment. Byrnes (1989) interviewed children and used euphemisms to refer to spending two years in the same grade, even first graders said, "Oh, you mean flunking".

Eighty-seven percent of the children said that being retained made them feel "sad", "bad", "upset", or "embarrassed". Only six percent of retained children gave positive answers about how retention made them feel like, "you learn more" or "it lets you catch up".

Yamamto (1980) reported that children rated the prospect of repeating a grade as or more stressful the "wetting n class" or "being caught stealing". Two life events that children said were more stressful than being retained were going blind or losing a parent.

Concern for excellence in education and the various improvement efforts and school effectiveness programs which have been promoted by it, are to be welcomed in many ways. At the same time, the excellence movement may have a dark side. The danger is that standards will be pursued by retaining students rather than by altering teaching strategies, improving student attitudes toward education and increasing parental commitment to education. (Raffel & Switzer, 1986).

New York State achievement scores had been steadily increasing since 1980. at the same time, the proportion of children retained or identified as handicapped in the primary grades (prior to the grade level in

which high-stakes assessment begins) increased significantly. (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1992).

The team proceeded to conduct case studies of seven elementary schools. Their study discovered that rather than rewarding real instructional quality, rankings based on high stakes tests often rewarded questionable instruction practices such as retention in grade and special education placement. The consistently dismal record of retention in grade (Shepard & Smith, 1990) suggests that this practice may serve the needs of schools rather than the needs of children. Similarly, the achievement of children after they have been identified as mildly handicapped and place din special education is disappointing (Allington & McGill-Franzen 1989; Gartner & Lipsky 1987; Singer & Butler 1987). This approach to dealing with at risk students, simply because so little evidence suggests that the problems of low achievement are reliably affected by either retention or special education placement. If the increased accountability pressure from high-stakes testing actually promote such practices, then such testing cannot realistically be considered an avenue to improve student achievement (Allington & McGill and Franzen, 1992).

School retention policies appear to operate primarily as "signal systems" shaping staff attitudes and beliefs about the proper basis for action rather than directly controlling their decision making. Moreover, the signals provided by any given policy depend upon the general cultural belief systems that characterize and influence broader organizational patterns within school districts. Because school staff hold different beliefs and norms about the most appropriate ways of dealing with various student behavior and achievement problems they will construe identical policy provisions in quite different ways. As a result, it is impossible to predict with any degree of confidence what effect any particular policy action will have (Schwager, 1993).

In some school districts, remediation efforts before retention are considered part of normal classroom practice. Child-remediation programs includes "Individualized Learning Plan", " written learning goals", remedial plan", " instructional strategies", and most commonly an "Individualized Educaitonal Plan", (I.E.P.)

Though I.E.P.'s are administratively complex and costly to implement, there is a some evidence that their use in conjunction with grade-level retention does increase achievement (Peterson DeGracie, &

Ayabe, 1987). However, the limited evidence available suggests that, when combined with an I.E.P. in conjunction with age-made promotion, regardless of student's achievement level, is probably more effective than retention alone, retention with an I.E.P. , or social promotion alone. It is certainly true that student achievement is better supported by the use of an I.E. P. than by detention.

If staff have to spend additional time and effort to comply with the above requirements of if they must plan and implement special instructional programs for students facing retention, they are likely to be cautious in recommending student retention, confining this relatively drastic step to cases where decisions would be uncontested (Schwager, 1992).

Schwager, (1993) study of content analysis of policy documents collected from 1124 California school districts says retention decisions on grade level performance norms found in commercially available standardized tests would dramatically expand the pool of students eligible for retention.

Responsibility for retention decisions is placed solely in the hands of school staff and where mandated, parents. Larger districts tend to retain more students than the middle or smaller sized districts. They have

more complex retention policies, more objectification of standards, more language -minority students and an overall lower average achievement for all students.

Retention policies are designed to respond to an organizational symptom low classroom performance, rather than the underlying causes of the problem. The evidence of prior research makes it abundantly clear that retention in grade directly and adversely imparts student experience and future chances of success in school. Thus, it is important to examine staff interpretations of retention-policy signals rather than simply assisting the impact on the frequency with which students are retained or promoted (Schwager, 1993).

Manley (1988) says there has been little written about teachers' attitude toward retention. Yet teacher's hold a key position in the retention decision.

Tanner & Combs (1995) investigated a national sample of first and fifth grade teachers. The purpose of it was to determine perceptions and understanding regarding retention. A random sample of 880 first and fifth grade teachers reported in the study. The results revealed that teachers advocate retention. The major conclusion from this study was that

teacher's beliefs about retention were not related to education research on the topic. Either the research is not reaching the teachers or they don't believe the findings.

Among professionals and parents there is a prevalent and strong belief that retention is a necessary and valuable practice. A survey of elementary school teachers attending graduate school at one university found that 97% agree that retention can be a step in a child's education (Faerber, 1984). More recently, a survey of parents, teachers and principals in one American city showed that 60% of parents, 65% of teachers and 74% of principals felt that children should usually or always be retained when they do not meet grade level requirements (Byrnes & Yamamoto, 1986). In fact, teachers who worried about the possible stigma of retention to the extent that they concealed a child's retention in classroom practice, still felt that retention was helpful to children (Byrnes, 1989).

Parents, teachers and principals surveyed in the Byrnes and Yamamoto study (1986) cited lack of basic skills as the number one reason justifying retention. Since retention disrupts neither school scheduling nor school structure, student accountability concerns can be accommodated

without requiring system changes. Retention is a convenient but ineffective response to low achievement, underscored by common beliefs that "something" is being done to help the child. These beliefs almost certainly influence both the adoption and the implementation of school district policies.

There are numerous ways to provide extra instructional help focused on a student's specific learning needs within the context of normal grade promotion. Remedial help, before and after school programs, summer school instructional aides to work with target children in the regular classroom, and no-cost peer tutoring are all more effective than retention. Unlike retention, each of these solutions has been shown to result in more positive achievement gains for participating children than for controls.

Some schools "place" or performing students in the next grade with an individualized Educational Plan (I.E.P.) similar to the Special Education model of intervention. The student advances to the next grade with a specific plan for extra help in a similar fashion that the gifted students participate in.

Finally, there is a reason to believe that what poorly achieving students need is a more inspired and challenging curriculum, one that involves them in solving meaningful problems, rather than repetitive drill on based skills. Slow learners find repetitive skill mastery not only boring but devoid of any connection to the kinds of problems they encounter in the real world. Current learning theory indicates that skills cannot be learned effectively nor applied to new problems unless they are learned in context.

Research has demonstrated that retention, on average, does not afford retained students in lasting academic or social advantage, nor does it appear to be an effective remedial strategy. Nevertheless schools continue to hold back students in substantial numbers, indicating that research and practice seem to be headed in different directions.

Retention should be used only in rare exceptions, and new approaches to curriculum development, school restructuring, and individualized students instruction should become the focus of efforts to improve academic outcomes ( Meisels & Liaw, 1993).

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

Student's NCE score is reading grade 1 (Spring '93) grade 2 (Spring '94)

| | Scores | |
|---|---|---|
| Student | Grade 1 | Grade 2 |
| 1 | 45 | 1 |
| 2 | 28 | 35 |
| 3 | 33 | 21 |
| 4 | 32 | 23 |
| 5 | 1 | 6 |
| 6 | 27 | 41 |
| 7 | 47 | 50 |
| 8 | 49 | 41 |
| 9 | 45 | 39 |
| 10 | 44 | 32 |
| 11 | 32 | 19 |
| 12 | 31 | 41 |
| 13 | 50 | 30 |
| 14 | 21 | 33 |
| 15 | 27 | 11 |
| 16 | 44 | 39 |
| 17 | 43 | 72 |
| 18 | 46 | 45 |
| 19 | 39 | 37 |
| 20 | 46 | 31 |
| 21 | 49 | 45 |
| 22 | 24 | 42 |
| 23 | 41 | 40 |
| 24 | 47 | 42 |
| 25 | 49 | 39 |

## APPENDIX A (Continued)

Student's NCE score is reading grade 1 (Spring '93) grade 2 (Spring '94).

| Student | Scores Grade 1 | Grade 2 |
|---|---|---|
| 26 | 40 | 35 |
| 27 | 33 | 34 |
| 28 | 25 | 25 |
| 29 | 49 | 53 |
| 30 | 14 | 1 |
| 31 | 25 | 27 |
| 32 | 16 | 40 |
| 33 | 49 | 39 |
| 34 | 49 | 39 |
| 35 | 32 | 40 |
| 36 | 50 | 58 |
| 37 | 44 | 37 |
| 38 | 39 | 44 |
| 39 | 50 | 56 |
| 40 | 45 | 24 |
| 41 | 28 | 3 |
| 42 | 41 | 30 |
| 43 | 43 | 64 |
| 44 | 49 | 27 |
| 45 | 42 | 44 |

## APPENDIX B

Students retained in grade one scores in grade 1 (Spring '93) and grade two (Spring '95)

| | Score | |
|---|---|---|
| Student | Grade 1 | Grade 2 |
| 1 | 11 | 28 |
| 2 | 1 | 17 |
| 3 | 1 | 15 |
| 4 | 40 | 29 |
| 5 | 43 | 44 |
| 6 | 36 | 1 |
| 7 | 50 | 13 |
| 8 | 12 | 40 |
| 9 | 40 | 17 |
| 10 | 32 | 41 |
| 11 | 28 | 5 |
| 12 | 19 | 26 |
| 13 | 45 | 37 |
| 14 | 58 | 39 |
| 15 | 47 | 46 |

## APPENDIX C

Please complete this survey by circling the response that most nearly reflects your opinion.

Y=yes N=no U=undecided

Y N U 1. Retention prepares a student for successful achievement in the following grade.

Y N U 2. Retaining a student in first grade harms the student's self-concept.

Y N U 3. Immature first graders benefit from retention.

Y N U 4. The only time to retain is in the first three years of school.

Y N U 5. The decision to retain is a responsibility of the teacher.

Y N U 6. Alternatives to retention are a better avenue to follow.

Y N U 7. School policy encourages retention as a way to improve student success.

Y N U 8. Research on retention indicates that retention is improve student success.

Y N U 9. Parent attitude should be a major concern when retention is considered.

Y N U 10. My opinion on retention could be changed if educational studies proved me wrong.

Remarks: